

Partnership a Life Preserver for Washington Coastal Managers

Long before “partnering” became a buzzword for coastal managers, Washington’s Coastal Zone Management (WCZM) Program was reaping the benefits of working with the state’s other regulatory and educational organizations. For the past 15 years, the partnership has produced Washington Waterweeks, a five-week celebration of everything connected to the state’s water environment.

“People always talk about partnerships, but we don’t do it as often as we could,” said Tim Gates, outreach coordinator for the Washington State Department of Ecology, which oversees WCZM. “The partnering has absolutely been the key to our success.”

Waterweeks, held August 29 through October 4, grew out of WCZM’s participation in CoastWeek, a week-long, national celebration of coastal resources held each fall. Gates said they had the idea to merge with other area coastal management organizations and create an extended celebration marketing everything connected to preserving the water environment. “We really wanted it to have a special focus and a holiday-type feel,” he said.

They began by creating a management team, which Gates said wasn’t very successful. “It was real hands-on. We pretty much did everything. It got much better when we just got together to create the policy and hired a contractor to actually do the work.”

They changed the management team to a statewide policy board, which meets every other month and sets policies for Waterweeks. They hired a marketing firm to coordinate Waterweeks, which was created as a non-profit organization. WCZM pays \$20,000 of the contractor’s fee, making them the primary contributor, Gates said. The other agencies contribute as they can, with the usual contribution being between \$2,000 and \$5,000. The organizations provide in-kind services, such as sending mailings and printing posters, and many hold events.

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The contractor organizes the board meetings, creates a master plan, coordinates more than 100 events, handles all the media coverage, creates a tabloid-sized activity guide, and conducts an evaluation afterwards. The firm also is required to raise private money.



The 1998 Waterweeks theme is “Hands On for Healthy Habitats,” with many activities designed to help protect salmon.

Gates said the result of the partnership is a tremendous amount of publicity that generates a lot of public awareness and support. “We get a lot of media coverage, and one of the many messages we are getting out is that the shoreline and coast are valuable, that they are worth saving. With money as tight as it is these days, it’s getting harder and harder to justify doing outreach. By partnering we get a lot of bang for our buck.”

He said there are many side benefits to partnering. “I get to learn from my peers’ experience, and they generate a lot better ideas than I could if I was doing this by myself. We also learn what each organization is doing and we constantly stay in touch. It really helps me do my job better.”

For more information on Washington Waterweeks, contact Tim Gates at (360) 407-7256, or e-mail him at tgat461@ecy.wa.gov.